

Green Gaming—

An overview of a few intriguing environmentally-themed video games

by Royce Grayson Morse

Although Going Green encourages readers to unplug, go outside and experience nature firsthand, there are some fascinating video games available that can entertain while educating us about the environment, perfect for a cold, rainy day. Good games involve a thought-provoking experience geared toward maintaining the balance of nature or mitigating environmental damage; the best of them are engaging to play and easy on the eye as well.

Here are some top picks:

BioHarmOnius

<http://artworksforchange.org/bioharmonious/webplayer.html>

Creator: artworksforchange.org, an organization dedicated to creating “contemporary art exhibitions and projects around the work to address critical social and environmental issues.”

Concept: Two interconnected worlds, one natural and one man-made, must share resources to survive. The health of the natural world is being negatively impacted by the man-made world, which is in bad shape. In order to save them both, the player must move resources from one to the other, striking compromises that create viable environments on both.

Gameplay: A browser game that involves simple clicking and use of arrow keys.

Recommended ages: 10 and up. There’s a good bit of reading comprehension involved to understand the basic principle of the game, but this could be explained by a parent.

Pros: A nice-looking interface and pleasant sound effects. A six-minute timer, and several possible outcomes.

Cons: Requires a Unity browser plugin to run. Somewhat lengthy instructions are presented before the game begins, which will be repeated every time the game is restarted.

Garbage Dreams

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/garbage-dreams/game.html>

Creator: Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funding by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Concept: Assume the role of the Zaballeen people in Cairo, Egypt, who survive by collecting and recycling garbage. Starting with limited cash resources, the player has eight rounds (equivalent to eight months) to build up the level of recycling as high as possible by making choices about whether to upgrade or expand facilities.

Gameplay: A browser game with straightforward instructions and a point-and-click interface.

Recommended ages: 12 and up. Although the game isn’t difficult to play, there’s a level of strategy required that younger kids might have trouble with.

Pros: A thought-provoking look at how to make the most out of limited startup funds while maximizing profit and recycling as much as possible.

Cons: A fairly basic-looking interface, and it requires a degree of financial thinking that might not engage everyone.



BioHarmOnius

Collapsus

<http://www.collapsus.com/>

Creators: VRPO and Submarine Channel, which describes itself as creating “visually-led transmedia projects that explore the possibilities of ... new storytelling techniques.”

Concept: This multi-award-winning web game offers an immersive experience that blends a short film, news clips and mini-games. The premise involves the world’s challenges with moving away from fossil fuels to renewable resources, told through the eyes of different characters.

(continued on following page)



Garbage Dreams

Collapsus – continued

Gameplay: This is more web-based visual story-telling than straight gameplay, although there are some interactive components to it. Aside from the mini-games contained within the various panels, one can click on the different elements on each screen, and watch the story unfolding through live-action vignettes, cartoon-like drawings or real-appearing news clips. Blackouts and conspiracies abound.

Recommended ages: 16 and up. The story-telling is compelling and visually engaging, but it has fairly realistic film noir quality and a definitely adult vibe.

Pros: A unique, visually-rich, thought-provoking experience.

Cons: Not a traditional game; if that's what is desired, a different choice might be better. A big monitor makes for a better experience, since the multi-column visual format takes up a lot of horizontal geography.



Collapsus

Battle for Big Blue

Available in the App Store or on Google Play for mobile devices

Creators: G-Star Raw and celebrity Pharrell Williams, who also created the sounds for the game.

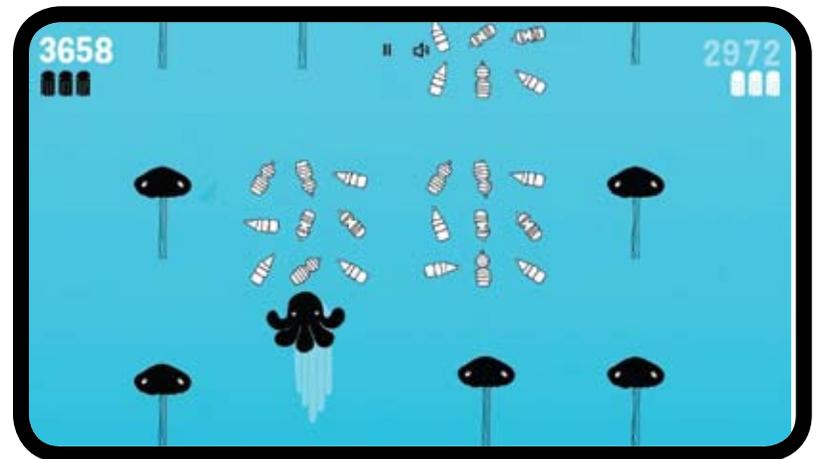
Concept: The game aims to raise awareness about the incredible volume of plastic deposited in the ocean, and according to Williams, the app should prevent anyone who plays it from ever dropping another plastic bottle into the sea. (Williams also has a clothing line made from recycled plastic.)

Gameplay: A very simple two-thumb-tapping mobile device game that allows the player to maneuver an octopus left and right in order to collect falling plastic bottles in the various oceans of the world. Play solo, with a friend, or battle Pharrell. While the game is simple, it's not easy, and it's the kind of thing that could become somewhat addictive.

Recommended ages: 5 and up. Kids will love it; it's cute, simple, and engaging.

Pros: Peppy music, adorable sea creatures, clean design, and it's easy to learn.

Cons: Not a lot to it, and surprisingly difficult for less agile older people.



Battle for Big Blue

Discover more on these websites:

http://www.gamesforchange.org/game_categories/environment/

<http://ecogamer.org/> (although many of these links no longer work)

<http://games.noaa.gov/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming_game

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